

William Lane

- 1861-1917
- Radical in socialist Australian politics
- White Australia advocate
- Paraguayan utopian settlement leader
- Imperial advocate
- Editor NZ Herald 1913-17



William Lane (1861-1917), journalist, trade unionist and Utopian, was born on 6 September 1861 at Bristol, England,

After proving himself a gifted pupil at Bristol Grammar School, William worked his passage to Canada at 16.

At Montreal his right foot, deformed since birth by talipes (club-footedness), was operated on with partial success.

In that time of widespread strikes and brutal repression, Lane worked at odd jobs and as a linotype operator, discovered social thought and by 24 was a reporter in Detroit, United States of America.

In 1883 married 19-year-old Anne Mary Macquire, born in Edinburgh. In 1885 the Lanes and their first child sailed for England, only to re-embark for Australia with Will's 19-year-old brother John. Two younger brothers had preceded them.

After settling in Brisbane in 1885, he became active in the Australian labour movement, becoming a prolific journalist for the movement.

He authored works covering topics such as labour rights and white nationalism.

Most prominent in his bibliography is his novella *White or Yellow?: A Story of the Race War of A.D. 1908* (1887). In this work, Lane proposed a horde of Chinese people would legally arrive to Australia, who would then overrun White society and monopolise the industries important to exploiting the natural resources of the "empty north" of the continent.

With the growth of the Australian labour movement, his "Labour Notes" in the *Evening Telegraph*, began to increasingly promote labourist philosophy. Lane himself began to attend meetings supporting all manner of popular causes, speaking against repressive laws and practices, and Chinese immigrants

He became a powerful supporter women's suffrage. Lane became increasingly committed to a radically alternative society.

He began the trade union funded Brisbane weekly *The Worker*, the rhetoric of which became increasingly threatening towards the employers, the government and the British Empire itself.



Lane was largely responsible for the formation in 1889 of the Australian Labour Federation, an organization of Queensland unions. He covered the 1891 shearers' strike, His ironically titled novel *The Working Man's Paradise* (Brisbane, 1892) was written by 'John Miller' to raise funds for the imprisoned unionists' families. While the defeat of the shearers and other strikers helped to turn the labour movement towards the political action from which the Australian Labor Party emerged, it turned Lane into a Utopian by-road.

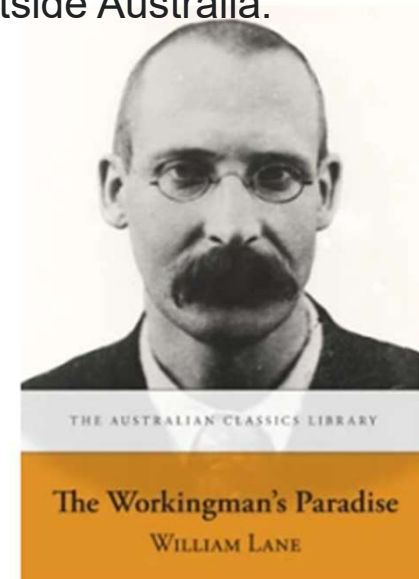
He is a key figure in Australian Labour History. Has an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

The defeat of the shearers' strike convinced Lane that there would be no real social change without a completely new society, and *The Worker* became increasingly devoted to his New Australia utopian idea which would later be made a reality.

A split in the Australian labour movement spurred Lane's intent to found a socialist utopia outside Australia.

Lane's ideal was to build a society based on:

- A common-hold, rather than a common-wealth
- A brotherhood of English-speaking Whites
- Life marriage
- Preservation of the 'Colour-Line'
- Teetotalism
- Communism



Nueva (New) Australia, Paraguay 1893

The first group, almost entirely men, was meant to set everything up for the thousands who would follow, to create the world's first great communist city.

They commissioned the construction of a ship and sailed to Buenos Aires and from there the 238 adults and children travelled across the grasslands in the heart of South America to Paraguay, where the national government had granted them land to start their own colony.

For a few years, new colonists continued to trickle into both communities from Australia and the UK, but the majority of settlers left, heading back to Australia or to farm work on Patagonian estancias.

The jungle environment may have caused cracks, but Mr Lane's rules and regime potentially did more damage to the fledgling community's long-term hopes.

He had immediately set very strict rules banning alcohol or any fraternisation with the local women, which proved particularly difficult for many of the young single shearers.

Mr Lane broke away with a smaller group of followers to start another commune.

He then led another attempt with an even more devoted group of 60 Christian socialists, who built a new community named Cosme. That too failed.

Around eight families did remain and to this day 2,000 descendants of those colonists still call Paraguay home.



The first group of Australians who sailed to South America in the 1890s to start a commune.

Lane left Cosme with his family in 1899, to NZ, then returned to Australia where he worked briefly as editor of the *Sydney Worker* before sailing again to New Zealand.

After initial melancholia, he soon re-found his old verve as a feature writer from 1900 for the *New Zealand Herald*, writing under the pseudonym 'Tohunga' only this time as ultra-conservative and pro-Empire.

He had retained the strong racial antipathy toward East Asians.

In 1906, with others, he formed the National League of New Zealand, later renamed the National Defence League of New Zealand. Its aim was the introduction of compulsory military training. Lane was the driving force behind the NDL as editor of its journal, *Defence*.

He was a master of scaremongering, berating New Zealanders for being 'worthless and...unfit', and raising fears of 'the unnameable horrors of Asiatic hordes'.

During World War I he developed extreme anti-German sentiments.

Partly as a result of its campaign the government passed the Defence Act 1909, which introduced compulsory military training. The NDL went into abeyance in 1910, its task completed.

Lane continued to write urging the formation of a local navy.

As an advocate of eugenics, he opposed breeding by the 'unfit'.

He attacked the New Zealand Federation of Labour, describing its members as 'designing agitators, largely foreign and wholly incapable'.

Became editor of the *New Zealand Herald* in 1913.

Lane died on 26 August 1917 in Auckland, New Zealand, aged 56.

He is buried at Purewa – but not acknowledged by them as one of their remarkable residents.

Has an entry in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* and a Wikipedia page.

Celebrated by today's *Herald*?

The New Zealand Herald



William Lane
Grave in Purewa
Block F, Row 41, Plot 100
No headstone.

Anne Mary Errington Lane 1864-
1928 is in the unmarked plot
beyond.

THE FIGHT FOR THE PACIFIC

BY TOHUNGA.

NZ Herald 24 May 1913

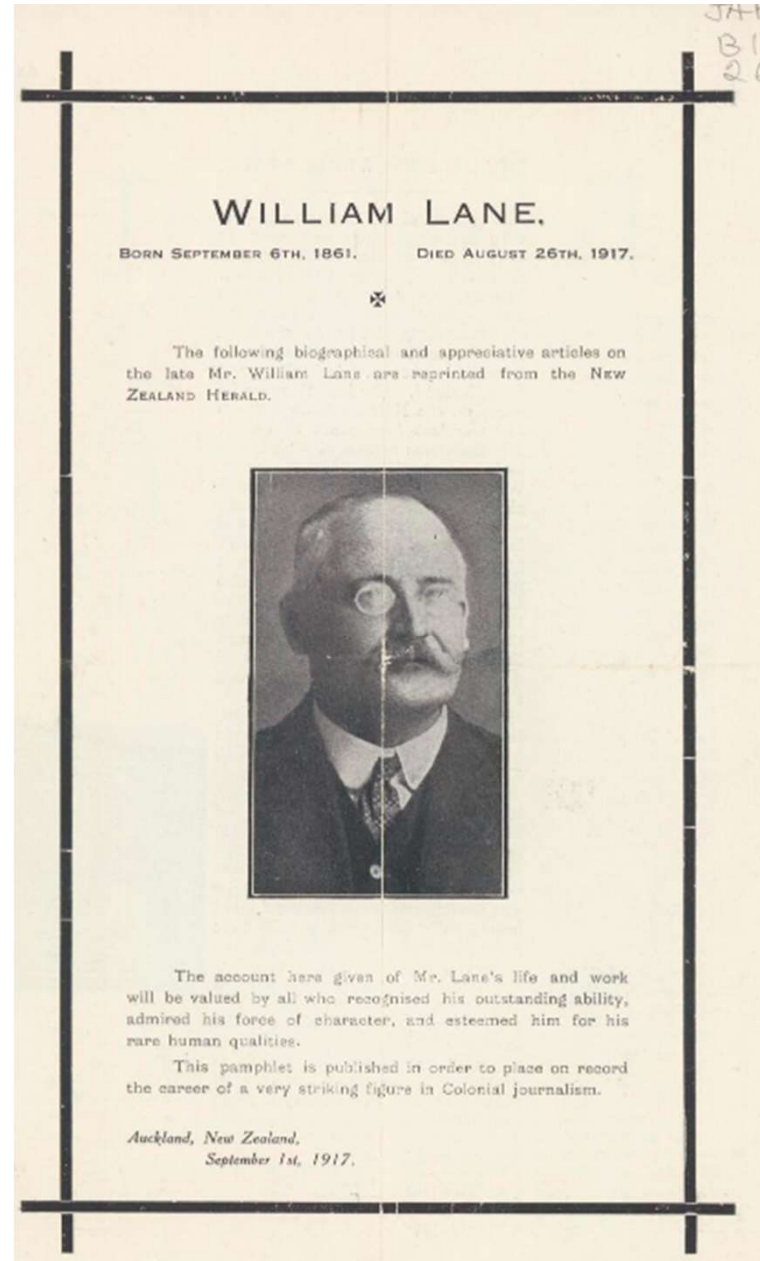
Papers Past

of the moon. War between Asia and Europe in the Pacific is inevitable. If we intend to keep New Zealand, we must prove that it cannot be taken from us.

Shall we win, when Asia comes down upon us, when the war we are waging at this moment passes suddenly from its passive to its active stage, when the sun and the stars are dimmed by battle-smoke, when the seas and the lands are stained with blood? Why shouldn't we? If we

Against Asia, the Britisher and the American are brothers, and can be nothing else. We can no more afford to see California go down before Asia than the men of the Pacific Slope can afford to see Australasia overrun. Statesmen may hesitate to say this, but in their heart of hearts our kindred peoples know this—as instinctively as they knew that the great canal must go through and that every mother must send her boy to learn how to fight. In this Pacific fight New Zealand does not stand alone, nor does the Empire stand alone. It is the Aryan civilisation that is challenged and that is answering—and in the Pacific Aryan civilisation depends upon the English-speaking men, whatever their flag and whatever their nationality.

End



Title page of a posthumous booklet of biographic and appreciative articles, published by the Herald